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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, AF/E (GAREY), IO/UNP (FITZGERALD)

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: EGYPT, ARAB LEAGUE ON CONTACT GROUP,
ISLAMISTS VISIT, PIRACY

REF: A. SECSTATE 16168

[1](#)B. SECSTATE 18101

Sensitive but unclassified, not for Internet distribution.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Arab League and Egypt are supportive of ref A proposal for restructuring the International Contact Group on Somalia (ICG). However, the Arab League wants to see better planning to make the group more effective, and Egypt wants to ensure that there will be strong coordination between the proposed sub-groups and the ICG plenary. Arab League and Egyptian interlocutors say they encouraged Somali Islamist leaders from the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) during their February 11 - 13 visit to Cairo to begin direct talks now with the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), rather than first insisting on an Ethiopian troop withdrawal. They assessed that ARS leaders would be willing to talk directly to the TFG if it accepted in principle a concrete plan for Ethiopian withdrawal, with support from the international community. On countering piracy in Somali waters per ref B demarche, Egypt supports international efforts at the request of the TFG. End summary.

ICG reform

[1](#)2. (SBU) We delivered ref A demarche to Arab League African Affairs director Samir Hosni on February 24 and Egyptian MFA Cabinet Advisor for African Affairs Ahmed Abu Zeid on February 26 jointly with Norwegian Embassy DCM Geir Sorenson per instructions. Hosni offered to provide a more specific response to the proposal to reform the International Contact Group (ICG) on Somalia at a later date, but agreed that reform is necessary to make the ICG more effective. In particular, he criticized organization of the meetings, saying that the U.S. and Norway as co-chairs need to plan more specifically and consult members prior to meetings to ensure that progress gets made on specific items. Currently, he said, the Arab League is not even aware of which countries will attend until the meeting actually happens, noting his surprise that Ethiopia was invited to the most recent meeting. Additionally, Hosni noted that the League plans to operate in conjunction with the UN and AU regarding Somalia, and that he sees those three organizations as the prime international players on the Somalia crisis.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Separately Abu Zeid said that Egypt has no objection to the proposal to create cluster groups subordinate to the ICG plenary. Egypt had requested through its embassy in Washington to be part of the political cluster. Abu Zeid thought that more clarification on the role of the cluster groups was needed, stressing that mechanisms to ensure that the plenary and proposed cluster groups all work together toward the same goal are unclear. Additionally, the current

structure of the group was good in that it allowed the members to address important issues directly at the top level, and Abu Zeid worried that this capability would disappear with the cluster proposal.

¶4. (SBU) Separately, Sorenson told us that Norway had also suggested that the UN representative should chair the ICG, and that there needs to be a better defined control mechanism from the ICG plenary over the proposed cluster groups.

Somalia Islamists Visit Cairo

¶5. (SBU) Both Hosni and Abu Zeid provided readouts on meetings with Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) leaders February 11 - 13 in Cairo, including Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad and Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan. Local press had reported that the delegation led by Sheikh Sharif Ahmad was visiting Egyptian officials and participating in a public symposium, while Somali press also reported that they were to meet "high ranking intelligence officials" (NFI). Hosni said that he met with the ARS leaders to emphasize the need for direct dialog between the ARS and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. He assessed the ARS is willing to have "secret talks" with the TFG but not overt discussions, insisting on a plan for Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia first. Hosni advocated pressing Ethiopia and TFG President Youssef to talk to the ARS and propose a withdrawal plan, in order to support the "moderate" ARS versus the more "extremist" Shabaab Islamist group.

¶6. (SBU) Abu Zeid said that Egyptian interlocutors (NFI) also emphasized the need for direct talks between the ARS and the TFG, and that an Ethiopian withdrawal should be a point of

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discussion rather than a prerequisite to talks. Egypt supports proposing an international community-endorsed plan for Ethiopian withdrawal as a "road-map" to begin such negotiations. Abu Zeid assessed that the ARS leaders would be willing to consider direct talks with the TFG with such a plan as a framework.

¶7. (SBU) Separately, Sorenson passed us a readout of a meeting between the Nairobi-based Swedish, British, and French ambassadors to Somalia with the ARS during their Cairo visit. According to the readout, ARS leaders said that they need an exit strategy for the Ethiopian troops to be announced publicly before negotiating with the TFG. The Europeans reportedly attempted to convince them of the necessity of starting a dialogue between the sides, even without an Ethiopian troop withdrawal, and assessed that the ARS may be willing to negotiate with the TFG by "proxy" (NFI) even before a published Ethiopian exit strategy.

Egypt Supports International Effort On Somali Piracy

¶8. (SBU) Asked about combating piracy off the Somali coast per ref B demarche, Abu Zeid said that Egypt supports international action on this issue as long as it is within international law and at the request of the TFG.
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